



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
NEW ORLEANS DISTRICT, CORPS OF ENGINEERS
P. O. BOX 60267
NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA 70160-0267

PUBLIC NOTICE: SCOPING MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT

Modification of the LCA Comprehensive Coastwide Ecosystem Restoration Study To Near-Term Ecosystem Restoration Plan for the Louisiana Coastal Area Study

Meetings:

April 19, 2004 (Monday) — Houma Municipal Auditorium, 800 Verret Street, Houma, LA 70360

April 20, 2004 (Tuesday) — Belle Chasse Auditorium, 8398 Hwy 23, Belle Chasse, LA 70037

April 21, 2004 (Wednesday) — Morgan City Auditorium, 728 Myrtle Street, Morgan City, LA 70380

April 22, 2004 (Thursday) — Lake Charles Civic Center, 900 Lakeshore Drive, Lake Charles, LA 70601

April 23, 2004 (Friday) — USGS National Wetlands Research Center, 700 Cajundome Blvd., Lafayette, LA 70506

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New Orleans District (Corps) invites your participation as we refocus and modify the Draft Programmatic Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (Draft PSEIS) for the Louisiana Coastal Area—Louisiana Comprehensive Coastwide Ecosystem Restoration Feasibility Study (LCA Comprehensive Study). The Corps believes that recent events and activities have influenced the purpose and need for action and the scope of the analysis of the LCA Comprehensive Study (see Study Modification Rationale). Hence, study efforts are being refocused to address critical ecosystem needs that require immediate attention over the next 10 or so years, to improve the scientific and technology base needed to effectively provide for the protection and restoration of coastal ecosystems, and to ensure the best possible use of available funds. Public scoping comments are requested on the Corps intent to prepare a Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (Draft PEIS) for the Near-Term Ecosystem Restoration Plan for the Louisiana Coastal Area (LCA Near-Term Plan).

Study Modification Rationale: On April 4, 2002 the Corps announced in the **Federal Register** (Volume 67, Number 65) its intention to prepare a Draft PSEIS for the LCA Comprehensive Study. The Draft Comprehensive Report and Draft PSEIS were submitted to the Mississippi Valley Division, the Corps Headquarters, the Office of Management and Budget, and the Council on Environmental Quality for review in November 2003. However, these documents were not released for public review.

The President's FY05 Budget, released on February 2, 2004 contained specific language that refocuses and advances planning, scientific, and restoration efforts that are already underway (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/fy2005/corps.html>):

"In 2004, the Corps will work to issue a draft report that identifies the most critical ecological needs and proposes a near-term program of highly cost-effective projects to address them. The report will also highlight the key long-term scientific uncertainties and engineering challenges facing the effort to protect and restore the ecosystem, and propose demonstration projects and studies to help answer these questions. The report will focus on the specific coastal areas that require the most immediate attention and on the best way to sequence the proposed work over the next 10 or so years, as we learn what works best. In 2004 the Corps will begin developing studies of potentially promising, long-term ecosystem restoration concepts, with the objective of determining whether they would provide a cost-effective way to create coastal wetlands. An existing Federal-State Task Force established under 1990 legislation will increase its efforts to build and evaluate highly cost-effective fresh-water and sediment diversion projects. This coordinated approach to restoration combines a commitment to address the highest priority needs with a search for innovative solutions. It also ensures that the coastal Louisiana restoration effort will, in the long-term, be able to adapt and evolve as needed, based on the best available science."

Scoping Comments: In addition to providing scoping comments at the scoping meetings, written scoping comments will be accepted until May 20, 2004.

Information Requested: Written comments on the following scoping questions, as well as any other scoping comments of concern are requested.

Question #1: What are the critical natural and human ecological needs that should be addressed in the PEIS? For example, critical natural and human ecological needs may include: deltaic processes, sustainability, hurricane and flood protection, protection of human infrastructure, and others.

Question #2: What are the significant resources that should be considered in the PEIS for the LCA Near-Term Ecosystem Restoration Plan? For example, significant resources may include: gulf hypoxia, barrier islands, offshore sand resources, water quality, and others.

The Corps also requests comments regarding the following nine LCA Near-Term Plan Identification Criteria:

1) Prevents future land loss where predicted to occur: one of the most fundamental measures of ecosystem degradation in coastal Louisiana has been the conversion of land (mostly emergent vegetated habitat) to open water. Thus, the projection of the future condition of the ecosystem must be based upon the determination of future patterns of land and water. Based on the U. S. Geological Survey open file report 03-334 "Historical and Predicted Coastal Louisiana Land Changes: 1978-2050", do proposed projects prevent or reduce future land loss or restore areas of past loss where scientist have documented these losses to occur?

2) Sustainability—restores or mimics fundamentally impaired deltaic process: this criterion refers primarily to projects or opportunities to restore or mimic natural connections between the river and the basins (or estuaries) and includes distributary flows, crevasses, and over-bank flow. Activities that mechanically move sediment from river to basins are also viewed as mimicking deltaic processes, especially if nourished by a small diversion.

3) Sustainability—restores endangered or critical ecological structure: this criterion refers to projects or opportunities to restore or maintain geomorphic features that are essential to maintaining the integrity of coastal ecosystems; includes natural features such as barrier islands, distributary ridges, cheniers, and beach and lake rims.

4) Engineering and design complete and construction started within 10 years.

5) Protects vital local, regional, and national community and socioeconomic resources: this criterion would identify the local, regional, and national social, economic, and cultural resources that are affected by the proposed opportunities and/or projects. These existing resources include, but are not limited to, noise, population, esthetics, housing, cultural, leisure opportunities, community cohesion and growth, public facilities and services, employment, business and industry, agriculture, and flood protection. Effects include both beneficial and detrimental impacts to human culture and their economic activities.

6) Public acceptability based on scoping and public meeting comments.

7) Based upon sufficient scientific and engineering understanding of processes.

8) Capitalizes on existing structure, resources, etc.: this criterion would identify the proposed project elements (i.e. freshwater diversions, sediment delivery via pipeline, marsh creation, etc.) that capitalize on existing infrastructure and resources to achieve the objective of the element. Existing infrastructure may include, but is not limited to, diversion structures that are in place but require modifications and/or improvements; diversion structures that are in place and operating but potentially not at full capacity (e.g. Davis Pond Freshwater Diversion Structure). Existing resources may include, but are not limited to, sediment deposition areas that are adjacent to or near proposed marsh creation elements or shoreline restoration elements; sediment-rich waterways that may be tapped for influence in disconnected and degraded coastal regions.

9) Construction does not preclude other options and/or projects.

Scoping comments will be compiled, analyzed, and utilized in the plan formulation process. A Scoping Report, summarizing the comments, will be made available to all scoping participants and published on the Louisiana Coastal Area website (LCA.gov). Written scoping comments will be accepted from the date of this notice until May 20, 2004.

Address Scoping Comments To: William P. Klein, Jr., CEMVN-PM-RS, P.O. Box 60267, New Orleans, Louisiana 70160-0267. Comments may also be made via facsimile (fax) 504-862-2572.

Scoping Meetings Format:

5:00 - 6:00 pm - Open House (general information about the LCA program and process).

6:00 - 6:45 pm - Scoping Overview (rationale for study modification to Near-Term Plan).

6:45 - 10:00 pm - Public Scoping Comments (public provides scoping comments on the scoping questions and the LCA Near-Term Plan Identification Criteria).

Additional Information: Requests for additional study information may be made to the study managers: Major Jason A. Kirk at 504-862-1222; Tim Axtman at 504-862-1921; or Howard Gonzales at 504-862-1672; or to the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources project manager Jon Porthouse at 225-342-9421.

Date

Peter J. Rowan
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District Engineer

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